

STATEMENT OF SILAYI, WITH REFERENCE TO HIS LIFE
AMONG THE BUSHMEN.

BY W. E. STANFORD.

(Read July 21, 1909.)

Statement of Silayi, a Tembu of the Jumba tribe, under the chief Umgudhlwa, taken at Engcobo, Tembuland, on the 7th of May, 1884 :—

About the time of the war of Umlanjeni (1850) I went to the Tsitsa River to live. The chief of our tribe was then Jumba, the present chief Umgudhlwa's father. We had previously been living on the White Kei River (Xonxa). In that part of the country there were still Bushmen families and clans and they were on comparatively friendly terms with our people as well as other Tembu tribes. I became acquainted with them through Hans, a Hottentot, and Ngqika, who was a nephew of Hans on the mother's side, his father being a Bushman of Modolo's tribe named Qako. It was with Ngqika and a son of Hans that I first visited Ngqabayi, the chief of a Bushman clan whose haunts were in the Drakensberg Mountains, about the sources of the Xuka and Qanqaru Rivers. We started off on a stock-stealing expedition from home. Ngqika advised that we should go to Ngqabayi, and join with some of the Bushmen in order to ensure success. We found the Bushmen in the Umgqazo Mountains. The clan I found could muster forty-three men. Ngqabayi was then getting old, but still active and strong. He did not take part any longer in the marauding. The men were armed chiefly with bows and arrows. They also had spears, and three had guns—Ciyo, Nkwinti, and Tyazo. The guns were flint-locks. The arrows were poisoned.

Ngqika told Ngqabayi what we had come about, and he gave us five young men to go with us to steal stock among the Dutch. We travelled along the Drakensberg Mountains until we came to the sources of the

Kraai River. There the five Bushmen grumbled with us and left us. They said we did not understand stealing, and would be in their way. They took the direction of where the township of Dordrecht now stands, and we went down the Kraai River. We found in that direction a fine troop of horses belonging to a Dutchman. We drove them off about nightfall, and each caught one to ride, having brought bridles with us. Ngqika caught a grey mare, and I picked out a brown horse, a good one. He was very fiery, and I no sooner mounted him than he commenced to buck with me. The ground was rough, and in the jumps the horse gave he fell with me, and I got my knee hurt. The others came up and lifted me up again. The horse then went quietly, and we started driving ten of the farmer's horses before us. By daylight we were in the mountains, and at sunrise we halted and slaughtered one of the horses for food; it tastes like quagga-meat.

From there we crossed over the mountains at the Ntunjankala (Gatberg) and went with the horses to the Indenxa River, near where the magistrate Thompson lived (Maclear). From there we went on to our kraal at Tsitsa, leaving the horses where we knew we should find them.

We reported what we had done, and two of the horses were handed to our chief, according to our custom. Two more we took to a trader and sold; one of these was the grey mare ridden by Ngqika. On our return from the trader, near the Bashee, we found that a party of Dutch farmers had followed the spoor of the stolen horses. This information came from the Bushman tribe. It caused alarm, and the chief had three of us caught and tied up. The Dutchmen did not appear, and we were released afterwards. This treatment we resented, because what we had done was known, and we had presented two of the horses to the chief. Ngqika and Jan said they would leave and join the Bushmen. I determined to go with them. We went off accordingly with eight of the stolen horses, and joined Ngqabayi. Jan's father, Hans, also went, and while living with the Bushmen I married his daughter Ndaralu.

The tribe was then occupying a large cave in the Prynntjesberg. Ngqabayi received us cordially, chiefly on account of Ngqika, who was half a Bushman himself. We received bows and arrows and became members of the tribe.

Our first expedition from there was under Ngqika: a brave Hottentot he was! There were twelve of us; Jan was there too, and the rest were Bushmen. We crossed the Tsomo, full, at the upper drift, and made for the Waschbank. There we found a herd of about a hundred head of cattle, and oh! there were fat oxen among them! We swam the cattle through the Tsomo after getting the whole herd away from the Waschbank, and then we slaughtered three head; we took only the breast and

the choice parts of each, and went on. From there we travelled to Kowe (Slang River), and slaughtered two more oxen—fat, fat as they could be.

It is a custom of the Bush people, when any expedition like that I am describing is away, for the women and children, in searching for roots and anything they require, always to take the direction in which the men have gone, and they will travel a long way in this manner. As we returned this day with the cattle we were met by the women and children, and there was great joy over our success. That time the rain helped us, and no spoor of the cattle was ever traced.

We moved down the Gubenxa, and were attacked there by some Tembus. We then went to the Drakensberg again, near Hlankomo. After that seven of us, under the leadership of Ngqika, went again to the Waschbank and stole eighteen head of cattle, among them a big red and white ox. This time the Boers followed the spoor. They came up to us at the head of Maxongo's Hoek. We drove the cattle into an almost inaccessible place, and hid in some caves. They attacked us in them. Three of us were wounded with shot. We fought with bows and arrows; we shot a white horse belonging to them and killed it. Night came on, and they left us. We found the cattle where we had put them, and drove on in the dark. The next morning, from a neighbouring mountain, we saw the Boers following the track again, and we moved on further into the mountains and got away.

We had many expeditions of the kind I have described. Some of them we used to make into the Colony, right away to the inland districts. The Boers inland were not so sharp after us as those on the border. We lived on sheep and other stock as we went along, taking them one at a time, often in broad daylight while the herds were with the flocks, and got away unobserved. A Bushman with a skin over his shoulders would start down a donga, perhaps, and wait until the flock crossed it. He would then catch one and get away quietly; our movements were always careful. Every man we saw not of our tribe was considered and treated as an enemy. We hunted the eland, buffalo, hartebeest, and other game, and lived on it as well as on stolen cattle and horses.

The Bushmen were friendly with the neighbouring tribes, although they often stole stock from them. Sometimes a party would visit a Kafir kraal, and while some of the party asked for milk and so on, the young men would follow up from the mountain and get away with a fat ox or cow from the herd. We would afterwards pretend to assist in the search, and so throw them off the scent.

Q. What customs did they observe regarding marriage?

A. They "lobala" (pay dowry). A young man must present the father of the girl with the breast and heart of an eland before he can

get her. The girl has the band which Bush people wear round the waist, given her by the parents, and that is all that is necessary on either side.

Q. So there is no marriage ceremony?

A. None at all. There was no hut to be built, because we all slept in one cave.

Q. How were the children treated?

A. The children were treated kindly. They got their share of all we had. When young they were given decoctions of various herbs and roots. One thing the women made was a kind of thin porridge of the white ants found inside the anthills, mixed with a bulb called "incuwa" (according to Silayi's description of incuwa, it may be the *spiraxis*). The ants were roasted and water added afterwards; the bulb was pounded and dried, and then ground up to mix with the ants. I have tasted this dish and like it.

A custom I noticed among the women was to besmear themselves with the contents of the paunch of oxen we slaughtered. They would afterwards go to the nearest water and wash themselves. The men as a rule are quite naked, and the women were pretty much the same.

I was surprised to find how well the women could swim. There are many large streams rising in the Drakensberg, and these we frequently had to cross. The Bushmen do not practise the circumcision rites of the Kafirs, nor have they "intonjane." Boys and girls arrive at manhood and womanhood on marriage.

Parents are fond of their children, and, as a people, they are affectionate in their ways, but very passionate, and when in a rage don't care what they do. A quarrel between a man and his wife would generally result in dangerous weapons being used.

Q. Had they any way of hearing and deciding disputes?

A. We had disputes sometimes about game and other things. These were "talked" by Ngqabayi, the chief, and his judgments were respected.

Q. How many wives had Ngqabayi?

A. He had two; the rest had only one wife each.

Q. Did you see the poison prepared for the arrows?

A. The poison was prepared by Ngqabayi, the chief. He used the root of a shrub mixed with the bark of a tree. I know the shrub, but not the kind of tree from which he got the bark. The root and bark were boiled together in a clay pot until they became a black-looking jelly. It took days to prepare the poison; when ready, Ngqabayi served it out. The poison was deadly. Hartebeest died from it quickly, also gnus. Buffaloes were stronger and lived longer. If we wounded a buffalo in the daytime we expected to find it dead the next morning.

Q. Had they witch doctors?

A. No; they had rain doctors, and the Kafirs in the dry seasons always employed Bushmen to bring rain for them. They had medicine also for lions. There was a root we dug, which we pounded and attached to the manes and tails of the horses, together with the smelling parts of a skunk. Our horses were then safe. The root had a very unpleasant smell, and together with the skunk was too much for the lions.

Q. Did the tribe remain long in one place?

A. No; we moved from cave to cave and mountain to mountain frequently. This was to keep ourselves from observation. When pathways about any cave we occupied were noticeable we moved off.

Q. How did those who were out on hunting or thieving expeditions know where to find the tribe on their return?

A. When a cave was left a stick was always put in the ground, pointing in the direction the tribe had taken. They had tinder-boxes, got amongst the Kafirs, and we used fires also as signals.

Q. In moving along how did you proceed?

A. We moved always with the greatest caution. We had scouts out, and we had signals with the skins we wore, which we all understood.

Q. Where did they get the material with which the caves are painted?

A. It was taken out of the ground. Some kinds were prepared at the fire. They could paint very well.

Q. What did they use to paint with?

A. Hairs taken out of the tail or mane of a gnu. These hairs were tied together and fastened on a thin reed. The brush was then dipped in the prepared clay and used to paint with.

Q. Did you like your life with the Bushmen?

A. Yes, I got on very well with them. I left them at last on account of my people sending for me. Hans and Ngqika left the tribe at the same time. Hans and Ngqika afterwards went to the Qokolweni Mission Station, and I returned home. Afterwards they went to Adam Kok's country.

Q. What became of the Bushmen?

A. Ngqabayi and his tribe were attacked about the time of Nongqause (1858) by Umgndhlwa. They had stolen his cattle. The women and children were nearly all killed. Only two boys and one woman, Ngqabayi's daughter, escaped. Ngqabayi himself and a few of his men got away and took refuge in Umditshwa's country. After that they went back to the mountains, and the last news I heard of them was that they were about the sources of the Umzimvubu River (St. John's).

I am now a Christian, having joined the Mission at Lucwewe two years before the last Gealeka War, through which I served under you. It

was in that war that I saw that I was really converted. I came home without stealing a horse or a cow out of the stock captured.

Q. How long were you in the mountains with the Bushmen?

A. Nearly three years.

Q. Did you pick up their language?

A. I got to hear (*i.e.*, to understand) what they said, and I could talk a little with them. (Silayi here made use of some Bushman sentences which he remembered.)

SILAYI, his × mark.

Witness, W. E. STANFORD.

The names given by Silayi were pronounced by him in Kafir, the language in which he was speaking.